

International Helvi Sipilä Seminar 9 March 2023, UN CSW67

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Mr. Minister, Excellencies, dear participants,

First of all, I would like to thank the Finnish women's organizations for organizing this traditional seminar, that bears the name of Helvi Sipilä, the first female Assistant Secretary General in the United Nations. This seminar is a long tradition that demonstrates the very close cooperation we have in Finland between the government and civil society actors. In a small country like Finland we have to harness all resources. We need the expertise and ideas of civil society organizations, academia and private companies to enrich our foreign policy, as well as our domestic equality policy.

It has been a pleasure to have Ms Mona Sinha as a keynote speaker, representing Equality Now, the winner of the 2019 International Gender Equality Prize of the Government of Finland. Finland established the prize to mark the centenary of Finnish independence and the paramount role that gender equality has had in our own development.

During the past year there have been discussions in Finland on whether we take gender equality too much for granted, thinking it is in our DNA and relying on historical narratives. Last year, The Ministry for Foreign Affairs commissioned a study on how Finland has promoted gender equality during this government term. The study noted, inter alia, that the status of gender equality and the tools to enhance it must be constantly re-evaluated to match the changing realities.

Dear friends,

Technology and digitalization are changing our world in an unprecedented way. Therefore, when we try to match the changing realities, the intersection of technology and gender is exactly where we have to look at. Finland has been a co-lead in the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation from the very start of the Generation Equality campaign. We are delighted to see that this year's CSW and the Report of the Secretary-General build upon the work carried out in that context.

Technology and digitalization carry both huge opportunities and huge risks for the realization of human rights. In our work in the Generation Equality Action coalition, we have been focusing on technology-facilitated gender-based violence and harassment. It poses a threat to democracy and requires global solutions.

We must also see the positive potential of technology. Technology companies are spearheading innovation and development. That development must become human rights-based. Ideally, digital platforms could be used to transform discriminatory social norms. Technology and digital solutions could help even in addressing the most serious violations of the rights of women and girls, like those in Afghanistan or in Iran. Innovative ways such as distance learning could be considered as a way to ensure that girls can continue studying despite the prohibitions set by authorities. It is crucial to embed gender equality and non-discrimination in the design, development and deployment of technologies. Women must participate in the development of platforms and tools on an equal footing, and women must also become leaders in tech, in data development and governance. Special attention must be paid to women and girls in vulnerable situation, such as women with disabilities, women belonging to ethnic minorities and elderly women.

Finally, it is essential to engage men and boys in this work. Without addressing gender stereotypes and the work culture in the tech sector it will not be possible to reach gender equality. We need men as allies. In this spirit, I would like to extend special thanks to Minister Thomas Blomqvist for being an active advocate for gender equality and also for our Generation Equality work during the past four years.

Once more, thank you to the organizers of this seminar and thank you to all participants, both here in the room as well as those who are following virtually. I am confident we all feel empowered and ready to work even harder for a more equal and more human rights-based tech, which can be harnessed in the service of realizing the rights of women and girls.